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McGill News

Winter 1979

The McGill-Finland exchange

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Date-limit for registration:

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Announcement of the results of the competitive examination: around the 15th of May 1980.

A scholarship application form may be obtained at:

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  Tél.: (418) 643-3862
- Student services of Québec universities.
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*Based on the average of the last three years.

Gouvernement du Québec
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**Direction générale
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McGill News

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Cover:
For six weeks last summer, fifteen McGill students and their two professors conducted scientific research—and formed lasting friendships—north of Finland's Arctic Circle. Made possible through an exchange program between Turku University's Kevo Subarctic Research Institute and McGill's Subarctic Research Station in Schefferville, the group's unique experiences make fascinating reading.

Cover photograph by Harold Rosenberg and Barry McGee.

The copyright of all contents of this newspaper is registered. Please address all editorial communications and items for the "Where They Are and What They're Doing" columns to: The *McGill News*, 3605 Mountain Street, Montreal, Quebec, H3G 2M1. Tel.: (514) 392-4813.

Erratum:
The caption beneath the lower photograph on page 5 of the Fall 1979 issue of the *News* should have read: "The Faculty of Agriculture's new Macdonald Stewart Building was *officially* opened June 2. The building is named to honour the College's founder, Sir William Macdonald, and its benefactors, *the late Walter Stewart and his son David Stewart.*" We sincerely regret the errors.

Paljon kiitoksia! Giittos eatnat!

"Thank you"—in the Finnish and Sámi languages—was an integral part of everyday vocabulary for the fifteen McGill exchange students who spent last summer living, studying, and working among the Laplanders of northern Finland.

By Valerie Lavoie-Simpkins.

It is a crisp summer morning in northern Finland and a group of McGill students and their professors stroll unknowingly across a private beach. Mistaking them for trespassing surveyors, the Finnish woman who owns the property runs out to protest. There are embarrassed smiles on both sides as the Finnish-speaking professor explains the purpose of their field trip. With characteristic Lapland hospitality, she welcomes the strangers into her home for coffee and conversation.

This is but one of the many memorable experiences that fifteen McGill students and two professors shared last summer during six weeks above Finland's Arctic Circle. Their trip was the second half of an exchange program between McGill's department of geography and Turku University's Kevo Subarctic Research Institute. In the summer of 1978, eleven Finnish scientists had conducted ecological and botanical studies at the McGill Subarctic Reseach Station in Schefferville, Quebec. Last July McGill reciprocated, and a group of excited students and staff left Mirabel Airport bound for Helsinki.

The purpose of the exchange was two-fold, says Dr. John Lewis, an associate professor of geography. "One was to give the students field research in a foreign country. The second was to give them a cultural experience in another language and let them get to know the country and its people."

For students accustomed to studying in the Canadian north, field work in Finland provided a unique opportunity. "Most research in subarctic countries is done on a longitudinal basis," explains Lewis. "We wanted to work on a *latitudinal* basis." The research stations at Schefferville and Kevo were picked because they share similar environmental conditions.

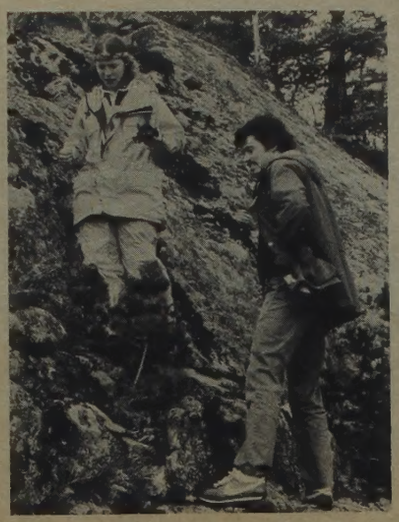
Two years of detailed planning were necessary before the trip could even get off the ground. German-born Dr. Ludger Müller-Wille, an assistant professor of geography who had once studied and worked in Finland, provided much of the energy and expertise required to set up the exchange. "I am interested in the cooperation of northern regions," he notes. "Each side can learn from the other, and I already had the contacts."

Müller-Wille and Lewis began writing letters—to Ottawa, to Quebec, to Finland, and to private foundations—to secure the necessary funds. Their efforts were rewarded: more than ten Canadian and Finnish institutions supported the exchange, contributing everything from money to Finnish cookbooks.

The difficult task of selecting fifteen student researchers then began. To provide a special learning dimension for the exchange, the professors wanted—and found—an academic mix: two students from biology, one from anthropology, one from urban planning, and eleven from geography. "We hoped to give students experience in both physical-science and social-science methodology—an appreciation of both viewpoints," explains Lewis.

The diversity of the group proved to be a plus for the students. "The biggest impact for me was the exchange of the different disciplines," recalls urban-planning student Robin Pitsiladis. "I realized that through my academic career, I had been zeroed in; now, I'm a little more open to other disciplines and interested in other things. I always used to be lost when people talked about anything in the physical sciences: I don't feel as uncomfortable now."

This sharing of ideas was enriched by the range of field studies undertaken—everything from climatology and pollution to socio-economic change. Physical science students took inventories of northern streams and studied how grazing reindeer affect lichen growth and how global radiation affects the canopy floor. Meanwhile, the social scientists prepared comprehensive studies of the Utsjoki Valley (Finnish Lapland)—its economic base, its occupational and educational structures, and the effect of tourism on the Sámi population.



Top: Biogeography students Sarah Cooke and Gordon Butt study the vegetation of the Turku Archipelago, southwest Finland.

Above: Sámi M. Aikio guides group members on a mapping expedition in the Utsjoki Valley. Recalls Dr. Ludger Müller-Wille, "She was the only person we saw wearing traditional dress."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. LUDGER MÜLLER-WILLE

COURTESY OF McGILL GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT

Studying a new language, seeing a new country, and meeting new people were also part of this rich learning experience. Prior to the trip, students had studied Finnish and learned about the country's customs; advance briefing sessions culminated in a language immersion weekend last May. Says anthropology student Cliff Hastings, "Phrases like 'Where are the washrooms?', 'You have a beautiful country,' and 'I would like a Finnish beer' came in very handy!"

An elementary knowledge of the language was essential when the group travelled north from Helsinki. As it turned out, language lessons were often given by the local children. "They were very anxious to learn English," recalls Fraser. "They would point to an object—I would try to say it in their language, and they would say it in English." The demanding role of group interpreter fell upon Müller-Wille, whose knowledge of Finnish and Sámi made him the natural choice. "I was constantly translating in two foreign languages, neither of them my native tongue!" he explains. "This created a tremendous stress but I think everybody appreciated that." In addition, Müller-Wille kept a watchful, diplomatic eye on the group and its interaction with the community, ensuring that neither side inadvertently offended the other. "I had personal ties there, so the group as an extension of myself also had to be accepted."

Pitsiladis found the people "very friendly and interested in us. When there was a language problem, we laughed through it." A sense of humour, in fact, was almost a necessity as new challenges appeared with each new day. One student, who managed to lock herself in a washroom, found her stay extended to half an hour until the appropriate Finnish phrase came to mind, and she could alert someone to her predicament!

Northern Finland was an endless source of surprises for the students. Experiencing twenty-four hours of daylight meant more time for socializing—at least at first. "With the light never coming into darkness, we stayed up quite late the first few nights," remembers Fraser. "You know it's three o'clock in the morning but it doesn't feel like it," adds Pitsiladis. The students soon found, however, that even though the sun didn't need to sleep, they did.

The rugged beauty of the subarctic landscape was also a surprise. "It wasn't what I expected at all," says Pitsiladis. "It was much prettier and a little more affluent than I thought it would be. The environment was lush, with lots of birch trees—not the scrawny little sticks you would expect when dealing with an area so far north."

The highlight of the trip, however, was getting to know the Sámi. Long chats over freshly brewed coffee quickly became the norm as students ventured outside the confines of the group. Sauna three times a week, with the traditional dip in an 8°C lake afterwards, also became habitual—"We had very good evenings with the local residents," Hastings recalls. "They are a peaceful group," adds Lewis. "They like to sing and dance and especially to welcome you into their homes. You must drink lots of coffee and sit and talk with them. Just knock on the door at any time of the day, and they welcome you."

The Sámi take new friendships very seriously, as the students learned one evening. After a not-so-perfect rendition of "Alouette" in Finnish (which the students had learned prior to their trip), a Sámi was moved to *joik*, or sing a special song reserved for occasions of emotional significance. "It's not really a folk song," explains Pitsiladis. "It's an emotional, personal song. There are standard *joik*s that people sing and share. Others express personal feelings about the land or the people. There was a very good atmosphere that night: a Sámi won't *joik* to stran-

continued next page

gers unless he has a good feeling. We were very fortunate."

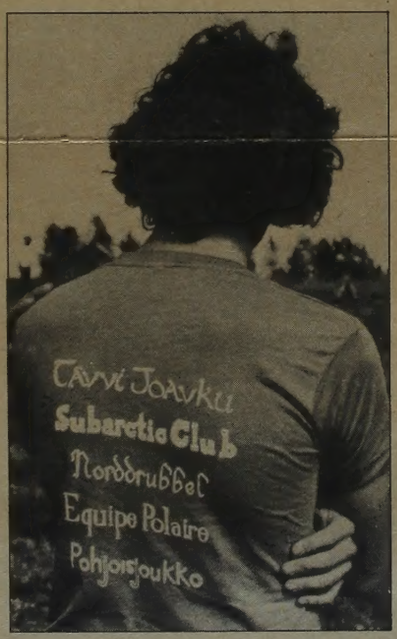
The McGill group extended a hand of friendship in other ways, too. A "Canada Day" sponsored by the students was held in Utsjoki's local high school. Over two-hundred residents attended. The group sang Canadian songs and chatted about their homeland. Students also worked on a hay farm for a day, helped roof a new house, and even appeared on Finnish television. Towards the end of the trip, the group participated in a symposium in Turku marking the two-hundredth anniversary of the death of Pehr Kalm, a Finnish botanist who conducted research in Quebec in 1747-49. They presented a summary of their field work to those in attendance, one of whom was Canada's ambassador to Finland.

Much of the students' research, as well as a log detailing daily experiences, will be published by the geography department next spring; their findings will then be forwarded to Finland for use in local planning in the Utsjoki commune, or county. McGill's Centre for Northern Studies will soon release the research papers prepared by members of the 1978 Finnish expedition to Schefferville. Though the exchanges were conducted in five official languages—Finnish, Sámi, English, French, and German—the monographs will appear in English, for later translation into Finnish.

Both professors and students look back on the exchange with satisfaction—and nostalgia. "I have to say it was a very personal experience—a challenging and positive one," says Müller-Wille. "I feel strongly that we have been successful. The students benefited in that they were able to appreciate a foreign culture. It broke them in—not for life, that is too philosophical. But for most of them it was a step forward—and a fast one!"

His professorial partner also developed a deep, personal attachment to the Finnish people and their country. "Even though I am a climatologist, I found the problems of the indigenous people fascinating," says Lewis. "They have adapted to the landscape; the reindeer herders are particularly in harmony with it. But they're going through a real problem with culture identification. They became quite 'Finnisized' after the Second World War; only recently has there been a resurgence of the Sámi language and a renewal of their culture. This is fascinating to me, especially because our problems in Canada are so similar." Though the landscape is less spectacular than the Rockies, Lewis feels the subarctic region possesses "a quality that is almost spiritual. It is difficult to describe. I just fell in love with the people and the location. I am planning to take my sabbatical there next year."

The McGill-Finland exchange trip also made an indelible impression on the fifteen students fortunate enough to take the trip. "We were like one big, happy family—this was surprising since we hardly knew each other in the beginning," smiles Pitsiladis. Fraser concurs. "We lived together as one group for six weeks—it's something I'm sure we'll never forget. We are still learning from our experiences." □



Top: Members of McGill's "Subarctic Club" help Vuotso reindeer herder, Sámi Lauri Hetta, pile hay for drying; the hay will serve as emergency fodder for her reindeer come wintertime.

Above: "We were like one big, happy family," says Robin Pitsiladis, one of fifteen McGill students who participated in the exchange. Heads of the "household" were geography professors Dr. John Lewis (fourth from the left, back row) and Dr. Ludger Müller-Wille (bottom right).

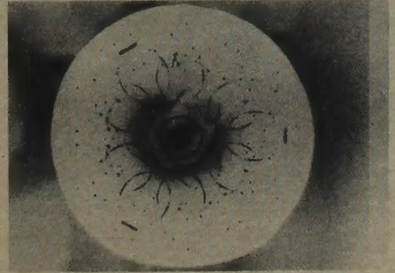
Left: Dr. Ludger Müller-Wille proves "he was there"!

Far left: Gordon Butt sports a multilingual group T-shirt—in Sámi, English, German, French, and Finnish.

$Mn_8^{2+}Si_6O_{15}(OH)_8Cl_2$=mcGillite

A new mineral recently described in McGill's crystallography laboratory is "worth much more than gold" to Professor Gabrielle Donnay and geological sciences graduate student Marc Bétournay, BSc'78. "It has no commercial use," explains Donnay, "but it still has 'value' scientifically; the mineral is of interest in itself, and when its description comes out next February in *The Canadian Mineralogist*, dealers will want to buy it—mineral collecting is very big business these days."

First discovered in 1945 at the Sullivan mine in Kimberley, British Columbia, the pearly lustered, pink mineral was mistakenly identified as friedelite. Bétournay, who worked for a summer at the mine, gave Donnay a specimen of the mineral a year ago. It was, they discovered, chemically similar to friedelite but had a higher chlorine content and different cell dimensions.



COURTESY OF DR. GABRIELLE DONNAY

A cone-axis photograph of mcGillite reveals the mineral's "coat of arms".

Further, a cone-axis photograph taken with a Buerger precession camera revealed a complicated disorder in the crystal structure (referred to here as the mineral's coat of arms) that was also unique.

Donnay and Bétournay identified the specimen as a new manganous hydroxychlorosilicate whose formula had never been registered with the Mineralogy and Geology Data Bank in Santa Monica, California. Permission to christen their discovery "mcGillite"—names of minerals "never begin with a capital letter," says Donnay—was recently granted by the International Mineralogical Association's Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names. The citation honours McGill University "for its pioneering role in Canadian geology and its 150 years of distinguished service to Montreal, Quebec, and Canada." The university administration also lauded the choice of name: the mining engineers working for Sullivan mine in its early days were all trained at McGill.

Holding up a three-by-four-inch chunk of rock, a quarter of which is sparsely striated with veinlets of mcGillite, Donnay observes: "It is rare these days to find new minerals in an amount as big as this—small as it is. Most new minerals you can see only under an electron microscope. You don't usually find them in mines anymore but in museums, where they have been mislabelled—or in the literature where their descriptions are incorrect." The professor is careful to point out that mcGillite is an inorganic, crystalline substance, *not* an ore. "Like all new minerals that are now being found," she adds, "mcGillite is not present in quantities large enough to have any economic impact."

With the Sullivan mine virtually out of mcGillite and the only other source located half-way around the world in Japan, mineralogists may have to settle for a glimpse of mcGillite in Ottawa's National Collection of Minerals—or in McGill's own Redpath Museum. *Cay Draper* □

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